

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 2095

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM

SUBJECT: REACTION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON LIBERIA

REF: STATE 060208

1. ON MARCH 25, THE FOREIGN MINISTER GAVE ME WHAT HE CALLED HIS "OFF THE TOP OF THE HEAD" REACTION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT ON LIBERIA. REFERRING TO A THIRD PERSON NOTE, BUT NOT LIMITING HIMSELF TO THE WORDING OF THE NOTE (A COPY IS BEING POUCHED), DENNIS TOOK EXCEPTION TO THE STATEMENT IN THE REPORT THAT LIBERIA HAD OPERATED UNDER THE SAME CONSTITUTION SINCE 1847. HE OBVIOUSLY FELT THIS STATEMENT TO HAVE DEROGATORY OVERTONES FOR HE COMENTED

EMPHATICALLY THAT THERE HAD BEEN FUNDAMENTAL AND PROGRESSIVE CHANGES IN THE LIBERIAN CONSTITUTION OVER THE YEARS. HE NOTED SPECIFICALLY THAT THE FORMER LEGAL DISTINCTIONS MADE BETWEEN COASTAL AREAS AND THE INTERIOR NO LONGER EXISTED. I REPLIED THAT THE REFERENCE TO THE LIBERIAN CONSTITUTION IN THIS REPORT HAD BEEN MADE IN APPROBATION AND WAS MEANT AS A TRIBUTE TO THE STABILITY OF THE LIBERIAN STATE.

2. DENNIS NOTED THE STATEMENT IN THE REPORT CONCERNING THE POWERS OF PRESIDENT TOLBERT AND COMMENTED THAT, ALTHOUGH NO ONE WOULD DENY THERE IS A STRONG PRESIDENCY IN LIBERIA, MANY
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STEPS HAD BEEN TAKEN TOWARD THE DECENTRALIZATION OF POWER.

3. DENNIS OBJECTED TO THE STATEMENT THAT "ELECTIONS ARE HELD ROUTINELY EVERY TWO YEARS" NOTING THAT IN FACT ELECTIONS FOR THE PRESIDENCY ARE HELD EVERY EIGHT YEARS, FOR SENATORS EVERY SIX YEARS, AND FOR REPRESENTATIVES EVERY FOUR YEARS. (COMMENT: I LET THIS PASS BUT, OF COURSE, ELECTIONS, OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER

ARE HELD EVERY TWO YEARS.)

4. DENNIS REMARKED ALSO ON THE STATEMENT THAT "PRESIDENT TOLBERT HAS CONTINUED THE POLICIES OF HIS PREDECESSOR" AND EXPRESSED THE FEELING THAT THE STATEMENT DID NOT SUFFICIENTLY REFLECT THE "RADICAL CHANGES" WHICH TOLBERT HAD MADE SINCE BECOMING PRESIDENT. AMONG THESE CHANGES, ACCORDING TO DENNIS, ARE THE IMPOSITION OF GREATER DISCIPLINE WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT, THE PROMOTION OF HIGHER STANDARDS OF MOTIVATION, THE INSTITUTION OF AN INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, AND IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM.

5. DENNIS ALSO RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE USE OF THE PHRASE "SUPRA-CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS" AND THE STATEMENT THAT TORTURE WAS NOT "ROUTINELY PRACTICED." THE LATTER, HE SAID, IMPLIED THAT TORTURE WAS IN FACT SOMETIMES USED. FINALLY, DENNIS OBJECTED TO THE FREEDOM HOUSE CHARACTERIZATION OF LIBERIA AS "PARTLY FREE." DENNIS SAID WITH SOME VEHEMENCE THAT LIBERIA HAS BEEN "FREE" FOR THE 130 YEARS OF ITS EXISTENCE.

6. I USED THIS OPPORTUNITY TO STRESS TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER THAT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HAS A FIRM COMMITMENT TO THE PROMOTION OF RESPECT FOR INTERNATIONALLY-APPROVED STANDARDS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THAT THIS IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR FOREIGN POLICY. I SAID ALSO THAT THE WORLD CAN EXPECT TO HEAR MORE FROM THE U.S. ON THE SUBJECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE COMING YEARS.

7. COMMENT: CONTRARY TO MY EXPECTATIONS, DENNIS DID NOT COMMENT UPON THE STATEMENT CONTAINED IN III. A., ARTICLE 8, OF THE REPORT
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TO THE EFFECT THAT "MORE LITERATE, AFFLUENT AND WELL-CONNECTED INDIVIDUALS APPEAR TO ENJOY ADVANTAGES IN MATTERS BEFORE THE COURTS." HARRY GREAVES, MINISTER OF DEFENSE, COMMENTED TO THE HEAD OF THE UNITED STATES MILITARY MISSION THAT HE FOUND NOTHING OBJECTIONABLE IN THE REPORT. TWO MIDDLE-RANKING FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS ALSO HAD NO DEROGATORY COMMENT TO MAKE ON THE REPORT. IT IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE THAT A COPY OF THE REPORT WILL REACH THE PRESS AND GAIN SOME CIRCULATION AMONG THE PUBLIC, BUT IT IS LIKELY THAT THE GOL WILL ATTEMPT TO PREVENT THIS. THE COMMENTS BY DENNIS REPORTED ABOVE WERE MADE IN A VERY LOW KEY AND WITHOUT RANCOR. IT IS MY GUESS THAT, AT LEAST FROM THE GOL SIDE, WE SHALL NOT BE HEARING FURTHER ABOUT THIS REPORT AT LEAST NOT OFFICIALLY.
CARTER

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Message Attributes

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